The National Park Service (NPS) recently asked the public to share its thoughts about four management issues that have seriously impacted Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument for 30 years: its inadequate and undersized visitor center; its insuffi-

cient museum collection storage; its failing roads and insufficient parking; and significant portions of the battlefield that remain unprotected and inaccessible. The park's last General Management Plan (GMP), completed in

1986, out-



lined an ambitious vision to address these issues but has never been implemented because of local politics, controversy about its recommendations, and cost.

The Public Engagement Process

Prior to conducting formal public engagement meetings, Superintendent Kate Hammond held a series of 32 pre-briefings with NPS officials, representatives from the park's 17 historically associated tribes, elected officials, and stakeholder groups. The park also held a formal government-to-government multi-tribal consultation meeting in October 2010.

The NPS held public meetings in December in Billings and Hardin, Montana, and in Golden, Colorado. It also hosted two virtual webinars that month to solicit feedback.

Approximately 170 comments were received by the NPS throughout the public engagement process.

Overall, participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn about and express their thoughts about the management issues. What follows is a brief summary of each of the management issues, what we heard during the public engagement

process, and what we intend to do next to tackle the issues.

Issue: The Visitor Center

The visitor center is outdated and too small to convey the causes and consequences of one of the nation's most significant and symbolic cultural and military conflicts. Visitation has tripled since the center was built in 1952. The space for exhibits, ranger programs and the park film is inade-quate.

The building has code and safety issues.

What We Heard: There is wide consensus that the park needs an updated, larger visitor center to adequately tell one of the most important stories of history of the American West and Northern Plains tribes. Some participants felt the visitor center should be relocated away from the heart of the park and its sensitive resources to land outside of current park boundaries, as called for in the 1986 GMP. They also felt the NPS should continue to work with the Crow Tribe and other land owners to make this vision a reality. Others felt it would be more cost effective and realistic to improve the existing visitor center and felt its current location near Last Stand Hill and the National Cemetery provides the best experience for park visitors.

Next Steps: The NPS will recommend negotiations with the Crow Tribe, the Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee, and other interested parties to see if an agreement can be reached to allow for

the construction of a new visitor center, museum collection storage, and parking area outside of the current park boundaries, as called for in the 1986 GMP. Congressional authorization would be needed to either expand the park boundary or build outside park boundaries. If, at the end of this concerted effort, significant progress has not been made, the NPS would commit to a new comprehensive planning process to address the park's management issues. In the meantime, recognizing that even under the best-case scenario a new visitor center is at least 5-10 years away, the NPS may pursue modest upgrades to the existing visitor center without changing the building's exterior footprint. These upgrades would ensure the NPS is providing a safe experience for visitors and adequately conveying the park's story while a new facility is pursued.

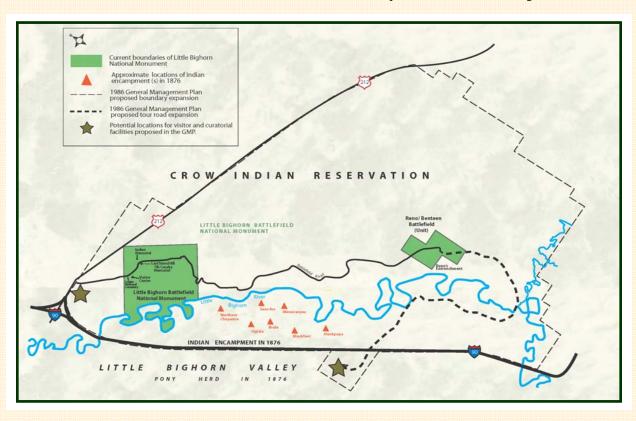
Issue: The Museum Collection

Most of the park's highly valued 149,000 artifacts

and archives are stored in the cramped basement of the visitor center, a space that wasn't designed for museum collection storage. It lacks fire suppression and adequate climate control, is inaccessible to staff and researchers with disabilities, and is at risk for flooding. Storage space is too cramped for the proper preservation of objects. The current space does not meet NPS standards for museum storage or American Association of Museum best practices.

What we heard: The public, stakeholders and tribes overwhelmingly recommended that the NPS take immediate action to safeguard the museum collection, even if doing so requires temporarily storing the collection off-site until proper storage can be built at the park.

Next Steps: The threats to the museum collection and the potential for irreversible degradation or catastrophic loss are serious enough that the NPS



has decided to protect the collection by temporarily moving it to the NPS Western Archeological and Conservation Center (WACC) in Tucson, Arizona. Approximately 30,000 items from the park's collection are already at WACC, a state-of-the-art facility. WACC is home to curators, archivists, and conser-

vators with extensive experience with the Little Bighorn collections who will be able to assess and evaluate the collection and assist the park as it develops a strategy for its conservation. The collection will continue to be open to researchers. The NPS will pursue ways to return the collection to the monument, its permanent home, when proper facilities are available.



Issue: Parking & Roads

The monument's parking lot is undersized and unsafe, frustrating and endangering visitors and park staff. The tour road was originally designed in 1938 and is too narrow for modern traffic, including buses and recreational vehicles. It is failing and unsafe in places.

What We Heard: People agree the monument has parking problems. But there are mixed feelings



and safety. Many people suggested that the park adopt some sort of shuttle system.

about how to fix it. Some people believe it would be

harmful to extend or widen the tour road or expand

the parking lot because doing so would impact the

battlefield and the historic scene, as well as increase

traffic, pollution and noise. But others believe better

roads and parking would improve visitor experience

Next Steps: The NPS will implement some short -term, partial solutions to the parking issues, including moving employee parking and improving signage. The park will also embark on an Alternative Transportation Feasibility Study in 2011 that will help determine what other possible solutions may exist.

Issue: Battlefield Protection

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument protects 765 acres, but the entire battlefield covered nearly 12,000 acres. The acreage protected reflects the U.S. military perspective; the sites of the historic Indian encampment and the initial battle are unprotected and inaccessible. The nonprofit Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee (CBPC) raised money and purchased approximately 3,000 additional acres to donate to the park, but the NPS does not have the legal authority to accept the land without Congressional authorization.

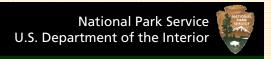


What We Heard: This complex issue raises many concerns and wide-ranging points of view. Many people feel the additional lands should be protected, but opinions differ on who should own and/or manage this land and how—whether it's the Crow Tribe, the NPS, individual owners or others. The Crow Tribe has raised concerns about the loss of tribal ownership of lands within the Crow Reservation, and believes the Crow Act of 1920 limits the amount of land that non-Crows can own within the reservation. On the other hand, there is concern about development taking place on land outside the park's current boundaries that would impact the park's relatively unspoiled historic setting. The NPS has very limited authority to construct outside of park boundaries, so adding at least a modest amount of additional land to the park—which would require Congressional authorization—may be a key to constructing a new visitor center, museum collection storage, and parking.

Next Steps: Short term, the park will invite the CBPC, the Crow Tribe and others to participate in focused discussions to see if a modest boundary expansion is possible in order to address the visitor center, museum collection, and parking issues. A longer-term approach to protecting the entire battlefield will require more conversation and exploration of land-protection options.

Please Continue Communicating

We encourage you to continue giving us your feedback. Contact: Superintendent, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, P.O. Box 39, Crow Agency, MT 59022. Email: libi_superintendent@nps.gov



Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Management Issues
Public Engagement 2010-2011



What We Learned, Next Steps